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ABSTRACT

This paper serves as a prologue to three case studies exemplifying instances in which the status of a student in the classroom was socially constructed by the teacher and the attitudes of other students. In each case the student was considered as a "problem" in the classroom. It is noted that teachers appear to include in their judgements of children not only such attributes of student status as academic ability socially constructed, but also such attributes as social class, race, gender, and family normality. The main aim of this research was to discover how different teachers in the primary grades learn to observe and make practical sense of what happens in their classroom from day to day. The first case study focuses on interaction between a teacher and a second grade student, and of the subsequent shaping of that student's social and personal identities in the class. The second study is of a boy who became a social pariah in the course of his second grade experience. In the final study, the process is traced of a teacher making a decision to identify a student as in need of special education. Brief analytic discussions accompany each case study. (JD)

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TOWARD A THEORY OF STUDENT STATUS AS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED

Frederick Erickson, David B. Boersema,
Catherine Pelissier, and Brenda Belson Lazarus

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TOWARD A THEORY OF STUDENT STATUS AS SOCIALLY CONSTRUCTED

Frederick Erickson[1]

This paper serves as a prologue to three case studies that were presented during a symposium at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting in April 1985. The topic of the symposium was the social construction of problem student status in the classroom. The aim of this paper is to define the notion of student status as socially constructed and to discuss the significance of the notion for educational theory and practice.

All four papers in the symposium derived from a project at the Institute for Research on Teaching at Michigan State University. Titled "Teachers' Practical Ways of Seeing," the project entailed a study of the practical and habitual observational activities of teachers--what they usually pay attention to as significant while they teach. In the project we learned that one of the major foci of attention by experienced teachers was what particular students were doing that made them "problems" from the teacher's point of view. The theoretical conception of problem student status has been informed by empirical work in the research project.

Problem Student Status as Socially Constructed

The commonsense understanding of student status, shared by many school practitioners and educational researchers alike, seems to be based on a psychological theory--sometimes implicit, sometimes explicit--that takes as axiomatic the objective existence of traits (such as intelligence, achievement, motivation, capacities, and dispositions for moral reasoning) that are

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[1]Frederick Erickson is coordinator of the Teachers' Practical Ways of Seeing Project and a professor of teacher education at Michigan State University. He also co-coordinates another project, Teachers' Conceptual Change in Practice.

located, as it were, inside individuals. This is a folk psychology, and a professional one, that is pervasive in Western culture, especially in British and American culture, since the late 17th century. In formal and informal assessment of students in schools the commonsense view is that the status by which a student is described in assessment (if the assessment is valid) is actually a trait of that individual. Thus, if a student is assessed as a "problem student," that individual in fact has some "problem" that is located inside. If a student is assessed as high in "achievement motivation," that means there is an entity, "high achievement motivation," that resides inside that student.

An alternative view asserts that student status is socially constructed in everyday life in classrooms. The presupposition behind this social constructivist viewpoint is that what are thought of in commonsense terms as attributes of persons can be thought of as residing in the situation of relationships among persons rather than as inside one person as an individual set apart from the situation in which the person is interacting. In such situations the individual interacts with other people and with social objects (in the classroom such objects as books, rulers, computers--any products of human work--are seen from this theoretical perspective as social objects with distinctive social meaning).

Problem Student Status and School Sorting Practices

The assumptions of a commonsense-trait psychology are fundamental to school practices of ranking students and grouping them in various ways for purposes of instruction. Students are ranked as higher or lower in terms of ability, motivation, and achievement. School organizations can be seen, furthermore, as one among many social service delivery organizations (e.g.,

hospitals and child welfare agencies). The raison d'etre of service providers in these organizations is the identification of some problems in the client that require remediation through the delivery of the service that the organization is constituted to provide.

In the schools, this *problem-finding function* entails sorting students into groups with problems and groups without problems. Clearly, the practical decision making by which this sorting is done, and the influence of this on the social structure that develops within school cohorts, classrooms, and classroom subgroups are of central importance to schools as institutions, at the level of the school organization as a whole, and at the level of the classroom. At the classroom level, decisions about social sorting are fundamental in the daily work of the individual teacher. These sorting activities can be considered from the perspectives of various social theories as just or unjust, rational or irrational.

Taking the perspective of liberal *order theory* that emphasizes societal homeostasis, the social sorting decisions of teachers can be considered just if those decisions are based on "universalistic" attributes of status--those potentially achievable by anyone regardless of accidents of birth. Among these attributes are academic achievement (as evidenced by formal tests) and classroom citizenship--the student's persistence at work and responsibility in relation with others in the classroom (as evidenced by the teacher's observation of the student's daily work habits and patterns of interaction). Social sorting decisions made on "particularistic" grounds--attributes of status such as social class, race, and gender--would be considered unjust, ascriptive, and irrational, according to liberal social theory, which views ascription and achievement as fundamentally differing dimensions along which relative social position is organized. Examples of theoretical work with presuppositions from

liberal social theory include that of Parsons (1959) and Dreeben (1968). Empirical correlational research in this vein includes that of Coleman (Coleman et al., 1966) and the reanalysis of the Coleman data by Mosteller and Moynihan (1972).

When teachers' social sorting decisions are viewed from the perspective of radical *conflict theory*, which emphasizes competition and conflict among groups for scarce resources, those decisions appear to be generally unjust. Particularistic attributes of student background seem to predict judgments about students by teachers and other school personnel despite the formal ideology of liberal commitment to equality of opportunity and to assessment of students on universalistic grounds. This lurking particularism is seen in radical social theory as a contradiction inherent in the liberal social enterprise. Examples of theoretical work with presuppositions from conflict theory are Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and Giroux (1983). Examples of empirical correlational research in this vein are Bowles and Gintis (1976) and Jencks et al., (1979).

Both in order theory and in conflict theory, attributes of student status, whether ascribed or achieved, are viewed as fixed entities whose meaning is constant for an individual student and also is constant across students. Correlational research has also treated such attributes as fixed, whether they were demographic characteristics of students (e.g., social class, race, gender) or indicators of student achievement (e.g., test scores, academic placement, special education referral, academic grades, deportment grades).

Such a static view of student status is misleading. Although dimensions of status such as ascription/achievement or particularism/universalism can be distinguished analytically and be treated as distinct in educational research, these dimensions do not seem to be kept distinct by teachers in their

practical decision making. The case studies that accompany this introduction show that student status from the teacher's point of view is a matter of practical regard in which the universalistic and particularistic interpenetrate and in which this multidimensional view of the student changes across time, given differing exigencies from day to day and across the course of the school year. Phenomenologically, teachers appear to mix these dimensions in their judgments of children; that is, not only are such attributes of student status as academic ability socially constructed, but such attributes as social class, race, gender, and family normality are also socially constructed in the teacher's daily experience of interacting with the child.

In the local circumstances of classroom life, sorting practices of teachers are practical in a fundamental sense--more complex, fluid, situation-specific, and multidimensional than much theoretical and empirical work has taken account of. When one understands this, one's view of the social sorting practices of schools changes fundamentally, as do the terms of the debate between radicals and conservatives regarding the fairness of school sorting decisions that affect students' social position in later life.

A Social Constructivist Perspective in Case Studies of Problem Student Status

First I will consider general findings from the research project and then use the case studies for instantiation. The main aims of this research have been to discover how different teachers of the primary grades learn to observe and make practical sense of what happens in their classrooms from day to day.

We have called the view of trait psychology a commonsense view that provides legitimacy for assessment and ranking of students. One status that emerges from these assessment and ranking practices is that of "problem student." Studying five experienced teachers intensively in the project, we have

found that our teachers viewed student status ("problem student" or "nonproblem student") in some ways that differed slightly from the commonsense view yet in other ways that resembled it. In daily classroom life, the teachers always view individual children in social situations, and they consider what one student is doing in relation to what others are doing. In that sense the teachers appear to be intuitive social constructivists. Indeed their discomfort with decontextualized assessment through diagnostic testing and achievement testing may be accounted for by this intuitive social constructivist view.

Yet, the teachers we studied seemed also to be thinking in commonsense terms in their conscious reflection on student status. If they wondered about a particular student, such as whether or not to refer a child for special education, the wondering did not take the form of a question such as "What is it in this pattern of relationships, including my relationships with this child, that gives me the impression the child is mildly emotionally impaired?" Rather, the wondering would usually take the form of a question like "Is this child emotionally impaired or not?" Such a question presupposes that ultimately an entity such as emotional impairment is an attribute of the person rather than a summary description of patterns of interaction among a number of individuals in specific situations. Moreover, such a question leaves out the contribution of the teacher's actions as part of the environment in which the child displays certain features of behavior that can be interpreted as evidence of emotional impairment.

Thus teachers' informal observation and assessment of children's status as students in the classroom may be intuitively conducted according to an implicit social constructivist theory and yet at the same time be consciously (i.e., reflectively) conducted according to an implicit individual trait

theory. A major difference between the classroom teacher's view of children in the classroom and the view of intermittent visitors who are researchers with an explicit social constructivist perspective may be that the researcher may be able to see more easily than the teacher can the teacher's own contribution to the social construction of the status of the student. An analogy can be drawn from family therapy in which the therapist can see more easily than can the parents some of the ways in which the parents' behavior may be contributing to what the parents perceive as recalcitrance on the part of their children.

This is not to say that the researcher's or therapist's view is more "right" than that of the teacher or parent as practitioner, but it certainly is different; it includes a perspective that appears to be missing from the commonsense view of the teacher or parent--for good reason--because people don't observe themselves while acting. If the researcher's view is not just illusory, however, and if the teacher's commonsense assessment of children usually does not include awareness of his/her own contributions to the phenomenon being assessed in the child, then that is an important limitation on practical judgment. It restricts the teacher's capacity to learn from experience.

The Case Studies

The social construction of student status is illustrated in the three case studies that follow. The first, by David Boersema, is titled "Hey Teacher! Who Am I Anyway?" The second, by Catherine Pelissier, is titled "On Becoming a Pariah." The third case study, by Brenda Lazarus, is titled "Getting a Special Education Identity."

"HEY, TEACHER! WHO AM I, ANYWAY?": TEACHER DETERMINATION OF STUDENT IDENTITY

David B. Boersema[2]

This paper is a brief case study of interaction between a teacher and her second-grade student, and of the subsequent shaping of that student's social and personal identities in the class. Within this larger context, several issues emerged: (1) the construction of students' identities was diachronic (i.e., they took shape over time and are understandable only with respect to the identities of other students, extracurricular situations, and the teacher's perceptions), (2) the construction of students' identities was relational (i.e., understandable in terms of their behavior and their interactions rather than personality or innate characteristics), and (3) the construction of students' identities was public (i.e., they took shape in such a way that public, visible features of the classroom setting, such as the citizenship chart, played an important part; and they are understandable in terms of those features). All of these factors waxed and waned in saliency for the teacher across time and between students. Contrasting examples are given from cases of individual students in the classroom.

A student's social identity in the classroom is determined in large part by the interaction of the student with the teacher and, in effect, by the actions of the teacher. Not only is the student's *social* identity determined in large part by the teacher, but also the student's *personal* identity is so determined. How the teacher interacts with the student is reflexively influenced by the ways in which the teacher makes sense of day-to-day activities and events, that is, what teachers see and how they come to see what they see.

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[2]David B. Boersema is a research assistant with the Teachers' Practical Ways of Seeing Project.

A classroom is, of course, a society in miniature, and it both reflects and absorbs much of the larger culture (or cultures) around it. No matter how diligent the education researcher is, the assimilation of the researcher into a particular classroom setting remains partial. The resulting interpretations by the researcher of the setting and the characters and the daily events must be taken cautiously and tentatively. The assertions made by the researcher, the conclusions drawn, the interpretations offered, must, by their nature, be seen as hypotheses, not as facts. Their hypothetical quality, however, does not rob them of their importance nor diminish their value. Though hypothetical, they may be reasonable hypotheses, internally consistent and clearly testable. The plausibility of alternative interpretations does not show the disvalue or simplemindedness of any particular interpretation; rather it shows the enormous complexity of the setting and the characters.

Student Deportment as a Theme in the Case Study

In the present case, it was only after the school year was completed that any overarching interpretation of the study site emerged. From what were at first disjointed assertions and isolated observations, a coherent picture of the site slowly took shape and eventually crystallized under the overview of the wider constraints and demands of the local school district; that is, the teacher's perceptions and actions seemed to be oriented toward classroom management, and this in the sense of modification of behavior. This behavioral desideratum was primarily to keep students academically "on task." This desideratum was motivated by the intention of the teacher to conform to the mandates of the local school district, especially with respect to dated testing and lesson planning. Quite simply, the teacher tried for the most part to coordinate the classroom events and activities to meet the district schedules.

This interpretation of the site and the teacher spoke to the guiding questions of the research project, particularly to the question of how teachers come to see what they see and make sense of day-to-day events and activities. In this particular case, it seems that much of what the teacher saw and the sense she made of what she saw was shaped by her concern for proper deportment in the classroom. Proper deportment in this case meant primarily nondisruptive behavior; that is, behavior which did not interfere with or interrupt the coverage of district-mandated academic material. What the teacher saw and what sense she made of the setting and the characters was (at least in large part) a function of her academic goals for the class as a whole.

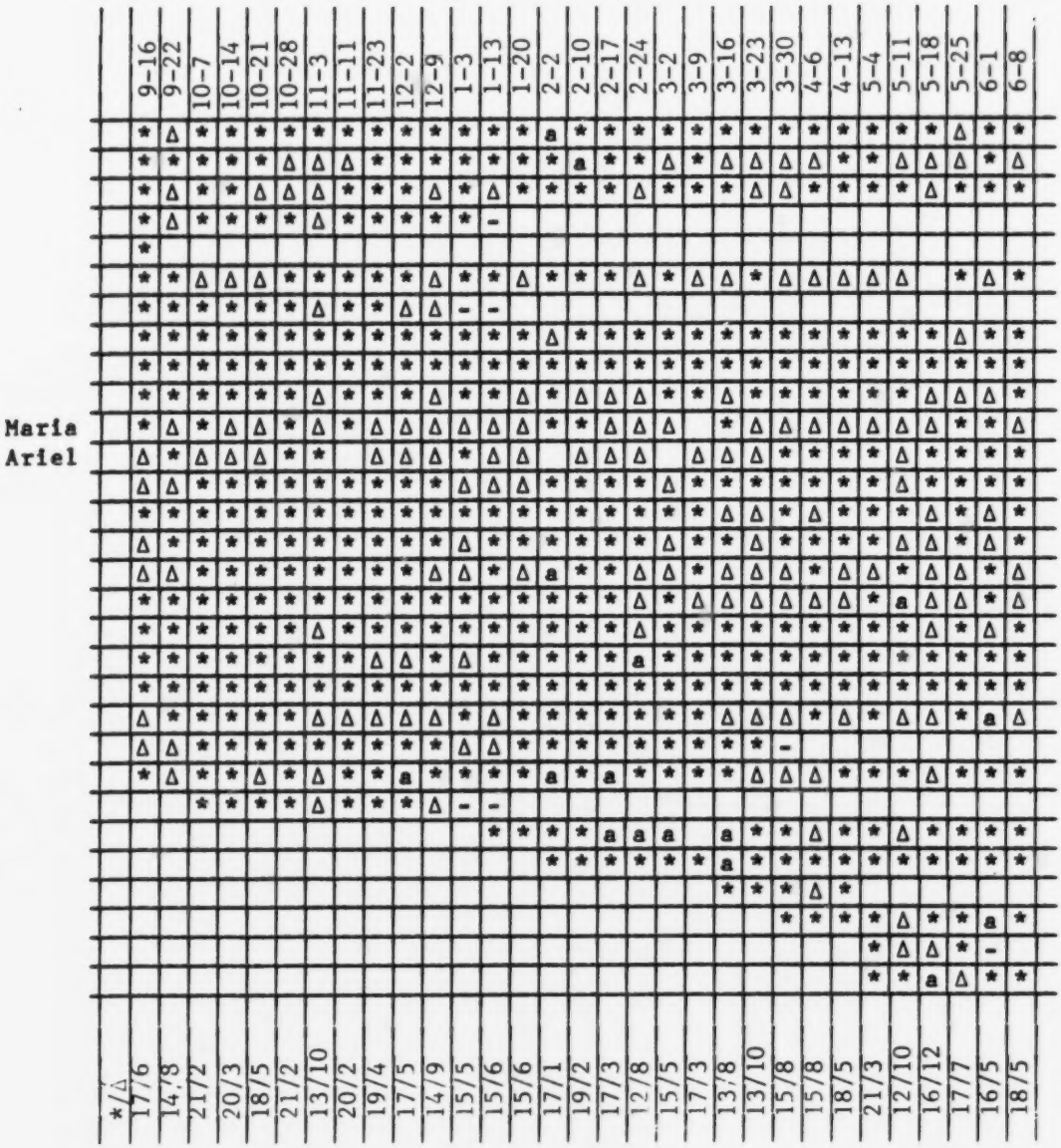
Furthermore, while those goals were in one sense mandated for her, they were in another sense reflective of her own philosophy of teaching and curriculum. The local school district determined for her what academic ends were to be attained (or at least sought), but her own conceptions and attitudes about teaching and curriculum determined the means to achieve those ends. To that extent, then, what she saw and how she made sense of it was influenced heavily by what she believed could and should be seen and what her purpose was in the classroom. It was, in a sense, her cognitive and professional interests that shaped what she saw and how she made sense of what she saw.

Under this rubric of "behavior modification to get done what the district says must get done," the smooth running of the classroom can be seen as a major focus for the teacher, and acceptable behavior can be seen as a means to this end. One of the main tools used to shape behavior was weekly citizenship ratings, with their accompanying rewards and punishments. The teacher seemed to use a variety of criteria (indeed different criteria for different students) in determining the citizenship ratings. Citizenship ratings were recorded on a citizenship chart, which was displayed on one of the classroom

walls (see Table 1).

Table 1
Student Citizenship Chart

GOOD CITIZEN



Note. * = great citizen!
Δ = shape up!
a = absent

15

Students' social status and identity within the class were directly affected by students' citizenship ratings, as the following short vignette illustrates.

Problems with Deportment and Citizenship: The Case of Ariel[3]

On the morning of May 29, 1984, the teacher began the day (after taking roll and seeing what lunch plans each student had) by leading the class in the "Pledge of Allegiance." A few moments later she asked who wanted to be helpers this week. Many students raised their hands. Jerry asked if he could "do the chart." The teacher said OK, and Jerry went over to the citizenship chart. As the teacher selected a student for a particular job (e.g., board washer), Jerry checked the chart to see if that student had received a good citizenship rating during the previous week. If not, then the student did not get to be a helper. This turned out to be the case for one student.

As noted above, a feature that stands out in this vignette is the significance of citizenship ratings in the makeup of classroom activities and communal status. Quite clearly, one's past behavior (supposedly reflected by one's citizenship rating) bore directly on one's role and status in classroom activities during the following week (at least). These citizenship ratings took on great importance in the shaping of the events, and ultimately, in the shaping of the characters in the classroom. More importantly, they helped shape not only the social status and identity of students, but they helped shape also the personal identity of students. This was borne out most clearly in the case of a particular student, Ariel.

Ariel was one of only two students (in a class of 24) to receive more "bad" citizenship ratings than "good." Ariel received 16 "bad" ratings out of

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[3]All names used in case studies are pseudonyms.

28. (The other student to receive more "bad" than "good" ratings was Maria, who received 21 "bad" ratings out of 30.) Ariel was seen as a particularly troublesome student, and in the first 23 weeks of school she received 15 "bad" citizenship ratings. Besides citizenship ratings being a sign of Ariel's "trouble" status, the way the teachers' referred to her was another such sign, as the following vignette suggests.

On the afternoon of February 23, 1984, the teacher and I were returning into the school building after having been outside with some of the students from the class (those students who had finished their work earlier), and we saw Ariel sitting out in the hall outside of the classroom. The teacher remarked to me: "Oh, I see Tallulah is out here." I said nothing. As we went into the classroom, the teacher's aide was sitting at her desk. The teacher commented: "I see Tallulah is out there." The aide replied: "I couldn't take it. She wouldn't listen and she wouldn't be quiet when I told her."

Several things stand out from the teacher's simple comment. First, the teacher's tone of voice and her use of the name "Tallulah" both indicated clear sarcasm. The fact that she repeated the comment to the aide in the same way indicated that she consciously chose the terms and the manner of reference. The use of the name Tallulah was, I assume, connected in some way with Tallulah Bankhead. The only sense which I could make of this is that it was a reference to someone being an actress and perhaps that Tallulah Bankhead had somewhat of a reputation for playing "hard-luck" women. Perhaps Ariel was seen by the teacher as a "hard-luck" girl or the teacher believed that Ariel saw herself as a "hard-luck" girl. In any case, Ariel had been seen by the teacher as a "bad" student. She was often mentioned as a source of exasperation, was often reprimanded in class, and was among the lower third of the students in academic achievement.

Only two weeks later, on March 6, 1984, an incident occurred which, I believe, had an important impact on the interaction between the teacher and Ariel and subsequently on the shaping of Ariel's identity both in the social and personal sense. At the end of the school day, the teacher caught Ariel taking a brownie from the teacher's desk. The teacher reprimanded Ariel. The next morning the teacher and the aide both found letters on their desks from Ariel. The letters said that Ariel was sorry for taking the brownie, that she was bad and she didn't blame them for hating her. At the end of that school day, the teacher and Ariel had a long talk (the details of which I do not know).

Prior to this incident, Ariel had received only 4 "good" citizenship ratings and 13 "bad" ratings (see Table 1, for the weeks before and after March 9). After this incident Ariel received 8 "good" ratings and only 3 "bad" ratings. In addition, on the last day of school the teacher awarded Ariel not only a service award (for service to the class, e.g. helping to clean the room), which five other students received, but also the Most Improved Student Award. These "good" citizenship ratings and the special awards at the end of the year do not reflect improved academic performance. Ariel did not receive a scholarship award, which six students did--but rather an award for less disruptive behavior. In an interview at the end of the year the teacher told me that Ariel had finally "shaped up and settled down."

Academically, Ariel was toward the bottom of the class. She was in the lowest level reading group throughout the year; only two other second graders had lower cumulative spelling test scores; and only two (the same two) had lower cumulative math test scores. However, when the teacher spoke to me about Ariel, it was rarely in terms of academics, and the classroom interactions between the teacher and Ariel usually involved Ariel's classroom behavior.

Maria, who was the other student to receive more "bad" than "good" citizenship ratings, was very rarely disruptive. The teacher and aide both commented to me numerous times that Maria "did nothing." Their complaint was not that she disturbed the classroom or any other students, but that she simply didn't do her work. At the same time, Maria's spelling test scores and math test scores were measurably better than Ariel's. In fact, compared to the other students in the class, Maria was in the middle of the range academically. While Ariel's behavior changed over time along with her accompanying citizenship ratings, Maria's behavior did not change over time, nor did her citizenship ratings (she continued to receive "bad" ratings). While Ariel received eight "good" ratings in the final nine weeks of school, Maria received only two (see Table 1).

Conclusion

Let us reconsider in summary fashion the features of student identities mentioned at the beginning of this paper: as diachronic, relational, and public. Who Ariel was changed over the course of the year and changed through her interactions with the teacher (more than through her interactions with other students). Who Ariel was also depended in large part upon her interactions and behavior, not on any innate or internal characteristics or personality features. Who Ariel was, in large part, was a function of public, observable, and malleable qualities. Identities were so public as to be correlated (at least in part) with a physical, observable object (the citizenship chart) located in the classroom. Finally, who Ariel was was shaped to a large extent by the teacher's tools for behavior modification and by what she saw as important and necessary for maintaining classroom deportment. The latter, in

turn, was important and necessary for meeting the teacher's cognitive and professional goals, namely, meeting district-mandated guidelines and deadlines.

ON BECOMING A PARIAH:
A CASE STUDY IN THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF STUDENT STATUS

Catherine Pelissier[4]

In many classrooms, there are one or two students who, because of gender, ethnicity, class--or what may simply be seen as consistently anomalous behavior--are considered outcasts. Such students often bear the brunt of derisive remarks, inattention, or other less overt forms of ostracism by peers and, occasionally, even by the teacher. They are sometimes students who must be worked with and "brought in," so to speak, to the classroom, and sometimes they are burdens which unfortunately must be borne. This paper presents a case study of one such pupil, Bob, and will trace his emergence and career as a pariah across one school year in a second-grade classroom.

Some descriptive snapshots will help to provide parameters for the meaning of pariah in this particular case. At one time or another, Bob was disliked by all participants in the classroom--by the teacher, by the children, and even by myself. His status in relation to his fellow students was most often reflected in their tattling against Bob, which happened to him more often than to any other student in the class;[5] in glances showing disgust; in reading group members sitting a little farther away from Bob than from the other children; and in less frequent events such as Bob's being the last boy picked for the team when the class was playing a "boy's" game, and remarks such as "Ugh, *Bob*!" when Bob's name was used as an example of a *b* word.

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[4]Catherine Pelissier is a research assistant with the Teachers' Practical Ways of Seeing Project.

[5]Recorded tattles against Bob across the year totaled 27 versus 42 recorded against all the other students combined.

Bob's pariah status in relation to the teacher, Mr. Fairley, was of a different tone than that vis-a-vis the students and had more diverse manifestations. These manifestations will be woven throughout the paper; suffice it to say here that Bob was the most consistently salient student for Mr. Fairley across the year and that we spent more time talking about Bob than about any other student.[6] His salience, moreover, although placed against a backdrop of genuine concern and affection, was most often of a negative sort.[7] Not only did Bob have poor work habits, such as not attending and not doing his work; he also had negative behavior habits, such as disrupting the class; poor relations with his peers; and negative personality traits, such as defiance. Additionally, Bob was sloppy, dirty, inconsiderate of others' property and needs, disrespectful, loud, rude, and obnoxious. As Mr. Fairley stated,

> We want to do something, he's doing something else. You want him to put away his work, he's got his work out. You want him to get his work out, he's got his work away. You've told him all morning to pick up his gloves; now you want his work out, and he's gotta get his gloves.

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[6]For instance, he was included in 41 of our 61 before- and after-school conversations, and was often the major topic of those conversations.

[7]A note is needed here on the nature of the teacher's affection for Bob, which is illustrated by the following comment Mr. Fairley made on June 13, 1984: "He's probably the most frustrating child I ever worked with, because I really like the little boy."

On April 15, 1985, I interviewed Mr. Fairley about his reactions to this paper. He suggested that more be said about (a) his concern for Bob (as in the above); and (b) the constraints of the other children (i.e., the mere fact that there were 21 other children in the class worked to prevent Mr. Fairley from spending as much time with Bob as he would have liked). Although time constraints prevented their inclusion in this paper, both Mr. Fairley's concern for Bob and the presence of the other students in the class are important factors to take into consideration in an analysis of Bob's status; they will therefore be included in the final report of this project.

And again, referring to Bob's future third-grade teacher, "I think it won't be two days before the teacher knows all about Bob and really doesn't care for him." The list goes on. In short, Bob was a child who not only seemed to be doing nothing right, but who seemed to be doing everything wrong.

An Analysis of Bob's Status as a Problem Student

In my attempts to discover the factors influencing the construction and maintenance of Bob's pariah status, I looked both inside and outside the classroom. My focus on factors external to the classroom arose directly from conversations with Mr. Fairley, who himself looked outside of the classroom in order to understand, explain, and participate better in Bob's in-class behavior.

The external factors which most influenced Bob's status seemed to be school records and family life. By the end of the second day of school, Bob's misbehavior prompted Mr. Fairley to look at his school record. Here he found what he called an "enormous" file, consisting of a rather overwhelming history of behavior problems. This information, coupled with Bob's continuing salience in class, resulted in Mr. Fairley's setting out to gather some of his own data on Bob's family background and situation. The outcome of this data-gathering enterprise, which consisted of both weekend outings with Bob and meetings with Bob's mother, was a portrayal of a deprived home life--of a family situation characterized by overly harsh discipline and lack of affection and guidance. This portrayal heightened what to Mr. Fairley were the differences between his middle-class background and values and Bob's lower class background and values and contained numerous references to stereotypical class markers, such as dress, cleanliness, presence of parents or lack thereof, and values regarding property, authority, and education.

This was not a case of malicious condemnation on the part of Mr. Fairley, however. He was aware of his class background and of the ways in which it augmented the differences in style between himself and Bob. As he stated in an interview on the topic of social class, "Most teachers come from a middle-class background and feel more comfortable with middle-class children that have the same values." Nevertheless, Bob's social class continued to be salient to Mr. Fairley throughout the school year, and he continued to invoke what he considered to be the major dimensions of contrast between lower- and middle-class families. In contrast to the middle-class children, then, and to the lower-class children who did not misbehave, Bob's behavior was often interpreted within the context of his "deprived," lower-class home life. The "problems" in Bob's household and the preceptions that Bob received "too much discipline" and "not enough affection," and that Bob's mother "just doesn't care about some things," reflected for Mr. Fairley characteristics of lower class households.

The salience of social class was, in this case, socially constructed. Bob's socioeconomic status not only had meaning in and of itself--it was made salient and given meaning within the context of *this* classroom. When Bob failed to participate in classroom activities, or when he acted inappropriately, Mr. Fairley looked outside the classroom and invoked social class as an explanatory framework. It was in this context that class markers such as shabby clothes and disheveled hair took on meaning and became relevant. Again, this did not happen with other lower-class children who behaved appropriately.

The internal, or in-class, factors that influenced the construction and maintenance of Bob's status were also socially constructed. My focus here was

primarily on Bob's behavior itself, as it was perceived by Mr. Fairley, and in relation to the behavior of the other students in the classroom. Here I found that what created Bob's pariah status, and what maintained it across the year, was inextricably tied up with what created and maintained the status of other students as nonpariahs. "Pariahness," like ability, is not something that resides in individuals but rather in the social contexts that define what pariahness or ability looks like--it is an accomplishment not of an individual but of a group of individuals. Bob, then, was not a pariah in and of himself but vis-a-vis others.

To illustrate this point, Bob can be compared with two students, one who suffered through the academics but did not have a behavior problem and one who was at the top of the class, both academically and behaviorally. Naomi, a child who struggled with academics throughout the school year, was seen by Mr. Fairley as a student who bordered on being a learning disabled child. Her academic problems were rarely connected to a lack of effort on her part or to any other broader kind of behavioral problem. For instance, when discussing Naomi's progress in reading, Mr. Fairley made the following statement:

> I think she's always going to have difficulty reading a word by itself on a piece of paper. She just . . . doesn't have enough phonics skills. But she is making a little progress on those long and short vowel sounds . . . .And she works very well on her work and she does very neat work and tries as hard as she can.

Contrast this with the following statement made about Bob:

> When he takes his time . . . and thinks about what he's doing, he doesn't really have any difficulty. I . . . don't think that Bob should have any difficulty learning to read, if he can get his act together a little better. And there is absolutely nothing hindering his ability to read . . . Except for the fact that the amount of time that he's paying attention . . . is about 10% of what most other children [do] . . . .He doesn't take the work seriously enough.

Naomi and Bob both had academic problems. Despite Naomi's "learning disabilities" and "gaps" in reasoning ability, however, she tried hard. Bob, in contrast, who was considered by Mr. Fairley to have the ability to produce good work, often produced work that was barely on a par with that produced by Naomi. It is reasonable to speculate, then, that Mr. Fairley's frustration with Bob in the academic arena was heightened when he saw how much more Naomi struggled with her work than Bob did with his.

An even more poignant contrast may be made between Bob and Richard, the prototypical model student in the class. Richard and Bob served as a contrast set for Mr. Fairley and, to a large degree, served to define each other as model, on the one hand, and pariah, on the other. They served additionally to set the boundaries on the range of identity types possible in the room, each child representing one extreme on the continuum.

Richard, according to Mr. Fairley, "forms that little core of kids that right now they do exactly what I want. They are exactly [what you] want in a student. You don't need to do any molding or shaping or convincing of a different way." Bob was just the opposite: "You know, he never picks anything up, he never helps anybody clean up anything. He uses things, he bothers people. He pokes them . . . you know, burps in their face . . . all those little things." And then there were the not-so-little things, like not doing his work: "I think Bob needs about two-thirds the amount of work that anybody else in here can handle, because after a while . . . he wants to play, and any time you're not looking he's ready to go play with anything."

Mr. Fairley also made some direct contrasts between Richard and Bob. For instance, when discussing student motivation, he said, "When I see Bob not working, since I know he's not assuming responsibility, I've gotta constantly remind him, 'cause I know he won't go back to his task. But I never say

anything to Richard." On another occasion, when discussing future school careers, he said, "You can predict the kids like Bob [i.e., he will do badly], and you can predict that Richard will probably be a good student in high school."

Richard and Bob served as a contrast set in the day-to-day life of the classroom as well, such as when Richard was sent to the office to get the disciplinary papers for Bob when he got into trouble during lunch one day. On another occasion, Bob himself invoked the contrast. The children were doing math work, and Richard was the first to finish his paper. In amazement, Bob exclaimed, "He's all done?!" to which Mr. Fairley said yes, adding that Richard got to work right away, and since he was done already, he now had free time.

This contrast between Bob and Richard serves to highlight the relative nature of student status. When Bob's identity is placed within the context of the classroom as a whole, it is clear that he stood out to the extent that he did, partly because there were few other children who possessed as many problem-like characteristics as he did, and partly because there were other children who possessed opposite, model-like characteristics, such as listening to Mr. Fairley, and moving with, rather than disrupting the flow of events. The situation might have been different if the class had been made up of a different set of students. For instance, when discussing his experiences in teaching in lower socioeconomic schools, Mr. Fairley stated, "the little kids don't respect teachers, they don't respect any adult. I mean not their parents either"; in such a context, Bob may have been seen by Mr. Fairley as normal, or average. In *this* class, however, and in comparison with such students as Richard, who seemed always to do everything right, Bob stood out and seemed always to do everything wrong.

Strategies Used by the Teacher Across the Year

Status is not a static thing, however, and, although Bob's status as a pariah remained relatively fixed across the year, it waxed and waned in intensity and quality. The strategies which Mr. Fairley used to cope with Bob also changed over time, affecting Bob's relationship with both Mr. Fairley and his peers.

By the end of the second day of class, Bob had been targeted as a potential problem; indeed, on that day, Mr. Fairley reprimanded Bob a total of 13 times, while the highest number of reprimands any other child received was two. From the beginning, then, Bob demonstrated a tendency to be perceived as *not* listening to Mr. Fairley, to get out of his seat just after Mr. Fairley had told the class to be seated, and to talk just when Mr. Fairley had said that he needed quiet.

Bob was not given a fixed, permanent pariah status, however. After school had been in session for two weeks, Mr. Fairley concluded a discussion of Bob by stating, "I think Bob will come around quite nicely before this year is over. I just have a really good feeling about him." This comment reflected the strategy that Mr. Fairley used throughout the first half of the year to deal with Bob. This strategy, in turn, reflected Mr. Fairley's interpretation of Bob's behavior as attempts at getting attention that he did not receive at home.

In general, Mr. Fairley's strategy during the first half of the year was to form a close relationship with Bob and thereby get him to fit in the class in an appropriate way. Mr. Fairley worked hard at developing this relationship. Not only did he spend time with Bob outside of school, he also gave Bob extra attention during the school day, such as spending entire recess periods

with Bob alone. There were smaller gestures as well, such as patting Bob on the head and hugging him during transitions between activities.

These attempts at closeness were coupled with a kind of firmness. Mr. Fairley kept watch over Bob, gave him large amounts of individual guidance on his work, and reprimanded him each and every time he did something wrong. Videotapes of reading group sessions during the first half of the year clearly illustrate Mr. Fairley's "eye" for Bob: one can see Mr. Fairley's constant attempts to bring Bob into the group by correcting his positioning and activity (Table 2).

Table 2
Reading Group Meeting, 9/9/83
Number of Reprimands Received by Bob

Reprimands received by Bob[a]	X			X	X		X			
Time				//(Teacher stops to reprimand //children at seatwork)						
	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
	30 Seconds	1 minute	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	5.0
Behavior reprimanded	stretching back away from group; not following along in reading book			flipping through pages in reading book[b]		flipping through pages in reading book; not sitting still during someone else's reading turn		handing teacher reading book before teacher is ready to collect them and while teacher is giving wrap-up talk		
	//							//		
	(getting ready not on tape)			reading turns				wrap-up		

[a]No other students reprimanded.

[b]Another student in the group noticed this first and started the reprimand.

One final aspect of Mr. Fairley's strategy during the first half of the year consisted of his attempts to get the other children in the class to influence Bob. For example, he had private talks with the three girls sitting around Bob in an attempt to get them to be quiet and set an example for Bob. He also tried to get the boys in the class to include Bob in their recess games, hoping that they too would set an example for him. There were more public references to this conspiracy as well, such as when Mr. Fairley said, "Well, we're gonna have to work with Bob" when a student complained about him or when he responded to Bob's claim that he couldn't do good work by having the whole class yell out in unison, "YOU CAN!"

Although relatively constant, this strategy waxed and waned in intensity as other children in the class increased or lessened in salience and as Bob's own behavior waxed and waned in intensity and kind. Nor, as stated, did this strategy remain constant across the school year. By the beginning of spring, Mr. Fairley seemed to have made a decision to lessen his focus on Bob and pay more attention to those children with whom he felt he could make a difference; and as the year wore on, this decision became more and more explicit. In an interview in May, Mr. Fairley said that "the one strategy I use [most] often . . . is to love them. And that hasn't worked. . . . That's been my biggest disappointment." He then went on to say that

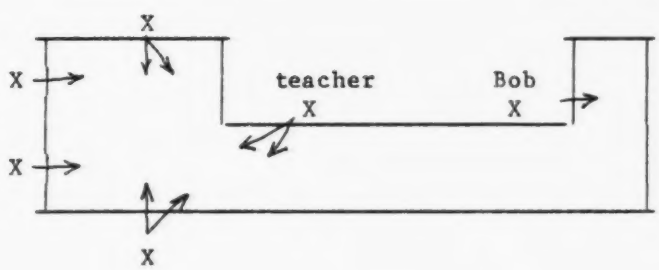
> I guess with Bob I've . . . decided I'm just going to survive the [last] six weeks with him . . . .I'll still teach him and . . . be pleasant to him when he's pleasant to me, but I'm not going after him for any kind of strategies to do anything, because I don't think it's going to work . . . and there's other children in here that I would like to send off with the last six weeks of a really nice time. . . . .You know, at the beginning of the year I was spending an awful lot of time with Bob, to the point of not giving time to other children, and I'm just not going to do that again.

This second strategy, which seems very different from Mr. Fairley's first strategy, reflected an attempt to just live with Bob, as well as an attempt to

decrease the amount of attention Bob received for his negative behavior and thereby possibly reduce its incidence. It also reflected an improvement in Bob's academic performance, which had occurred despite his misbehavior. In this sense, one can see a slight reduction in Bob's salience.

During the second half of the year, then, Bob no longer seemed to be the project that he had been for Mr. Fairley during the first half of the year. No longer was Bob on the receiving end of affectionate attention from Mr. Fairley, and no longer did Bob and Mr. Fairley go out on weekends or spend recess periods together. This difference in strategy is again clearly illustrated by videotapes of reading groups. In contrast to the reading group sessions of the first half of the year, one sees in these sessions very few attempts on the part of Mr. Fairley to incorporate Bob into the group. Rather, it was often the case that Bob had his back to the group and worked on his own, while the other children sought help from Mr. Fairley or stopped working to listen to his explanations (Table 3).

Table 3
Reading Group Meeting, 2/22/84
Bob's Positioning, Interaction with Teacher



In this 28-minute segment, Bob and the teacher interacted only twice, and Bob received no reprimands. Bob held his position constant ~~throughout~~ for 26 of the 28 minutes.

X indicates students' and teacher's positions

→ indicates direction people are facing.

One result of this decrease in salience was that Bob received fewer reprimands during the second half of the year than during the first half. Of the 191 reprimands against Bob recorded in field notes, 113 occurred during the first half of the year, while only 78 occurred during the second half.[8] One reason for this difference may be that if Bob was less salient during reading groups, for instance, he may have had less occasion to disrupt them. Despite this decrease in salience, however, Bob continued to misbehave and to be perceived as misbehaving. As Mr. Fairley stated in May, "He gets into more and more trouble outside of school in the morning and at lunch time. And it's harder and harder to get him to do the right things in class or to do what everybody else is doing."

Bob's relationship with his peers also changed during the latter half of the year. The well-meaning conspiracy of the first half of the year changed, and the children began to pick on and complain about Bob more frequently. But this led, in turn, to another kind of conspiracy. Concomitant with his strategy of lessening his own attentions to Bob, Mr. Fairley worked at lessening the attention the other children gave to Bob. At the end of March he told the children not to talk to Bob and, at the end of May, not to complain about him in public--to stay away from him. Although the children never quite succeeded in this strategy, one gets the impression that by this time Bob had become an untouchable in the true sense of the word.

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[8]This trend did not hold for the entire class. Bob was 1 of 8 students who received fewer reprimands during the second half of the year than during the first half. Of the remaining 13 students in the class, 1 received the same number of reprimands during both periods, and the remaining 12 received more reprimands during the second than during the first half of the year.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to present some of the ways in which Bob's pariah status was socially constructed. The portrait I have presented is not one of a boy who entered the classroom a ready-made pariah; rather, it is one of a boy who became a pariah and was maintained as one in *this* particular context, by means of the interactions between the various participants in the classroom. Nor is this a portrait of a boy who was victimized by the powers that be. Mr. Fairley had high hopes for Bob, and he worked hard to give Bob the attention and guidance that he thought he needed. Despite these efforts, however, Bob never became the success story that Mr. Fairley had hoped he would. Indeed, as he had predicted, on the third day of school this year, Mr. Fairley received a telephone call from the principal of Bob's new school, who wanted to know what was wrong with Bob.

GETTING A SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTITY: HOW AN EXPERIENCED TEACHER DECIDES

Brenda Belson Lazarus[9]

What is there about a child that sets him or her apart in such a way that the child's teacher considers a special education referral? How does a teacher decide who to and who not to refer? Teachers make decisions about children in the early grades that may profoundly affect the children's lives, both in and out of school.

The teacher's skill in practical reasoning and observation takes on great significance in the child's getting a special education identity. The significance of the interactions that occur within the classroom context cannot be overlooked. These interactions that occur between the teacher, the children, the curriculum, and the materials are intricately woven together in a rhythm that makes sense to those involved. The experienced teacher looks for signs of recurring patterns familiar from previous years. Children of interest wax and wane in salience as objects of the teacher's observations as she looks for telltale signs of problems, but it seems that each class has its own unique qualities. What factors enter into a teacher's ways of seeing particular children who trouble them?

Teacher observation means what teachers see in their daily interactions with the children in their classrooms. Practical reasoning is that reflection done by teachers to make sense of what they are seeing in their class. The teacher must make immediate sense out of what is happening in her or his classroom and take action on it in many cases.

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[9]Brenda Belson Lazarus was a research assistant with the Teachers' Practical Ways of Seeing Project.

Research Plan

Interpretive participant observation (see Erickson, in press) was used to gather data for this study. Members of the Teachers' Practical Ways of Seeing Project made extensive site visitations on 62 different days, 11 of which were full days and the rest of which were half days. This amounted to nearly 312 hours of observation. During the periods of participant observation, project members took extensive field notes and collected documents pertinent to what was happening in the classroom. Project members held periodic interviews with the teacher and recorded 10 audiotaped interviews that span the course of the school year. They collected 19 hours of videotape of classroom events. Selected pieces of videotape were used on four occasions in viewing sessions with the teacher (see Erickson & Shultz, 1977). The viewing sessions were audiotaped and later coded and analyzed.

Setting

The school used as the study site is located in a mid-Michigan community of approximately 30,000 people. The classroom observed was one of the four elementary schools in the district. The majority of the children spent their entire elementary school careers in this one school. The school had an enrollment of about 300 children, two classes at each grade level from kindergarten through fifth. There were 22 children in the class at the start of the year. During the course of the year 2 children moved and 2 more came in to the district. Children attending this school came from predominately middle- to upper-middle-class Caucasian families. There was one minority child (Oriental) in the room. The class as a whole had a total grade equivalent of 3.0 at the beginning of second grade as measured on the Stanford Achievement Test, Primary I, Form A. Although students in this class were academically

average or above average, from a behavioral perspective the teacher felt that this was a challenging class.

The teacher of the class, Mrs. Meijer (not her real name), was in her early thirties. She had been teaching in this school district for seven years, the past two at this school in the position of second-grade teacher. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education and a master's degree in reading from the local university. She had volunteered to take part in the study and was very open in expressing her personal feelings about teaching and what went on in her room.

Special Education Referral Process

To refer a child for special education services, a classroom teacher completed a four-page referral form, informed the child's parents of this, and gave the form to the principal. The school had a building team, comprised of the principal, the school psychologist, school social worker and reading specialist, to follow up on teacher referral forms. The team met weekly to discuss children who had been referred. At the meeting the specialists shared any previous information about the child that was available. The team would decide whether or not to seek psychological and educational testing for the child. The classroom teacher attended meetings for referrals of students in her class.

If the evaluations were carried out, the team would meet again to present their findings to the teacher. Shortly thereafter, the formal, Individualized Educational Program (I.E.P.) meeting would be held with the parent(s). The psychologist would summarize test results for the parents and make a recommendation regarding placement. There would be discussion, and then the proper form would be signed with the determination to place or not place the child in special education.

Setting Children Apart

As the school year got underway the children were informally sorted into categories by Mrs. Meijer. These categories were largely undefined, but they seemed to form sets. In order to begin to understand how Mrs. Meijer went about grouping children together, I carefully examined the field notes and interview audiotapes for all of her specific verbal references to sets of children. I felt that these natural families might show some resemblances that would prove to be indicative of the patterns involved when the teacher set children apart for a specific purpose, such as referral for special education services. Seventeen groups of children identified by Mrs. Meijer were located in the data. The 17 sets reflected teacher concerns, such as "gang of boys" and "off on Cloud 9" (see Figure 1).

The identification of mildly handicapped children in Mrs. Meijer's class began with her creation of categories for grouping the children. The first categories were global: children having problems and children having no problems. She soon began to refine these categories. The group of eight who had problems was further divided into two groups: the "has it, but can't put it together" group and the "doesn't quite have it" group. Later, the children with no problems became divided into two groups: the "extra bright, really with-it" group of six children and the normal children, the other ten. This practical categorization resulted in one student getting a special education identity (see Figure 2).

Setting Children Apart for Special Education Referral

I was particularly interested in the practical ways Mrs. Meijer used to set children apart for special education referral. I felt that by looking at the children she might refer, it would be possible to determine what set these

Date	Sarah (B)	Eliza. (B)	Neil (H)	Andrew (B)	Stacy (D)	Pammy (H)	Craig (H)	Jimmy (N)	Gail (T)	Joe (D)	John (N)	Judy (N)	Royce (N)	Jason (T)	Becky (N)	Paul (B)	Mary (D)	Jessica (B)	Doria (NC)	Donald (B)	Blake (N)	Karen (N)	Carrie (N)	Sally (NC)	Family Resemblances (Brief Descriptions)
9-9	x	x	x	x																					wanted to get to know right away
9-10			x		x	x																			first group of "isolated" children
9-21						x	x	x	x																"targeted" children
10-6						x	x			x															to be tested, need help to go on in school
11-26			x		x	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	x										"need to sit alone in order to function"
12-8				x				x			x					x									"bunch of talkative boys"
1-14					x		x		x	x							x								"off on cloud nine"
2-11							x							x		x									excluded for not following directions
2-11				x																					A=leader P=favorite
3-2					x				moved mid-year	x				moved mid-year			x	came mid-year							"on a par with I.Q."
3-2			x			x	x	x		x														came and moved within one week	still concerned about
3-11					x		x			x															"can no longer meet expectations"
3-11			x		x		x			x							x								none of their corrections done last week
3-11				x				x			x					x				x	x				"gang of boys"
3-23			x	x				x			x					x				x					"gang of boys"
5-26				x							x							x	x						highest readers on group reading test
5-26					x		x										x								only kids who scored below grade equiv. on reading test
	1	1	6	6	7	5	9	5	2	7	5	1	1	2	1	5	4	0	1	3	1	0	0	0	Total times set apart in groups

Note. Benchmark (B); Has It But (H); Doesn't Quite (D); Normal (N); Target (T); Not Categorized (NC).

Figure 1. Mrs. Meijer's informal groupings of children included as members of some sort of group as discussed in interviews/field notes.

All Children in Room 125
N = 24

Target Children
N = 8

All Other Children
N = 16

Adjustment/ Emotional Problem	Has It But Can't Put It Together	Doesn't Quite Have It	Developmental/ Maturity Problem	Normal Second Graders	Benchmark Students
N = 1	N = 3	N = 3	N = 1	N = 10	N = 6

Referred for Special Education	Not Targeted for Referral	Targeted For Spec. Ed. Referral	With It	Extra Bright
N = 2	N = 2	N = 2	N = 3	N = 3

SPECIAL EDUCATION IDENTITY	Not Placed	Not Referred
N = 1	N = 1	N = 2

Figure 2. Getting a special education identity in Room 125, 1981-82.

children apart from the others in the classroom. At the beginning of the study there was no way of knowing if the teacher would refer any children. As it turned out, she verbally targeted four--Craig, Pam, Joe, and Stacy--for referral. She went through the process for two, Craig and Pam. Both children were in the "has it, but can't put it together" group. I decided to look closely at this group of children, although this paper addresses just one of the children, Craig.

In order to study each of the three children in depth, I used the following process. First, I carefully went through the data corpus and examined all specific references to each child's behavior. I then analyzed and categorized these into the specific types of problems each was experiencing. Next, I studied available pieces of videotape to get a sense of the antecedents and consequences of behaviors in the context in which they occurred. Then, I wrote vignettes to portray action and also gathered short, supporting pieces of data. Portraits of the three children in the group showed a family resemblance as well as the particularistic attributes of each child. Family resemblance can be defined as a set wherein each member has at least one, and probably several, common elements, but no, or few, elements are common to all of the members of the set (Rosch & Mervis, 1975).

Getting a Special Education Identity: Craig

Craig was the first child referred for special education by Mrs. Meijer and the only child who was placed into special education. Mrs. Meijer's first opportunity to observe Craig's behavior was in the large-group context, because this was the primary interactional context at the beginning of the school year. Mrs. Meijer gathered the children together on the floor by her rocking chair prior to their dismissal to go home in the first few weeks of

school. Later in the year the children just lined up, but at first she made sure that each child knew what bus to take and had his or her book bag or lunch box. She made announcements that needed to be made to the children. Note how Craig sets himself apart.

Lining up to Go Home

> 3:15 p.m. It was time to go home on the first full Monday of the school year. The children were seated on the carpet at the back of the room. Mrs. Meijer was in her rocking chair. She directed everyone who brought his/her lunch box to line up. Nearly half the children got up and headed for the door. Mrs. Meijer next excused those who bought lunch in the cafeteria. All the rest of the children except one got up from the floor and went over towards the door. Mrs. Meijer had started to stand up when she noticed that Craig was still sitting on the floor, a bewildered look on his face. He appeared to be waiting. Mrs. Meijer asked, "What did you do for lunch today?" He answered that he had an egg sandwich. Mrs. Meijer waited and then said, "But you brought a sack, right?" Craig continued to sit until Mrs. Meijer went over and told him to join the other children in line to get on their buses.

At the time Craig's mix-up did not seem remarkable. Yet looking back, it is a clear example of the type of problem in comprehending the nature of school tasks that surrounded him all year long. Craig stood out from the other children on this fourth day of school. He had problems in taking directions or explanations in one situation and being able to transfer them to a similar situation when he encountered it. Bringing a sack lunch was not the same to him as bringing a lunch box, nor was it the same as buying a cafeteria lunch. The videotape of this activity clearly shows the expectation on his face. Most of his classmates did not share this difficulty, at least consistently. The lack of ability to generalize (or transfer what he had learned in one situation) tended to bother Mrs. Meijer as the weeks wore on.

Another example, this one illustrating Craig's need for structure, comes from a lesson on metric measurement that the class was having one afternoon. Craig seemed to be having a great deal of trouble to me, so later in the day

I asked Mrs. Meijer about his performance. She said that he "couldn't follow. Wasn't on the right page. Didn't see where the pictures . . . just didn't have those kind of 'put it together' things. Once Craig tore the page out of his book, he was completely lost." Mrs. Meijer said that Craig relied heavily on visual cues. She said that he had learned to compensate for his weak auditory skills by relying on his visual abilities. Craig was a child who was lost without visible structure.

One of Craig's biggest problems was not following directions, according to Mrs. Meijer. She felt that Craig's difficulty with directions came in the understanding of what to do. She suspected that his short-term memory might be the problem. Following is an example from the field notes of the seventh day of school regarding this type of behavior in an art class, which is generally an exciting part of second grade. Mrs. Meijer explained to the eager children that they were going to be given straws with which to make a design. Mrs. Meijer was standing in the middle of the rows of desks, but to the outside, facing them as she gave directions.

An Eager Artist

> When she was ready for them to get their supplies, she said, "People in my back row that are not lefties, may go get some scissors and a glue bottle for your row." Paul, Jimmy, and Jessica all got up and headed for the scissors can. Elizabeth stayed in her seat. She is left-handed. Mrs. Meijer was about to go on when she noticed that Craig was speedily on his way back to the supplies area. He had been sitting in the front row. She said to him, "Craig, are you in my fourth row?" Craig didn't say anything. He turned around with a sheepish grin on his face. He started to head toward his desk putting his left hand to his chin and then his right hand to his ear as he walked quickly back to his row. The rest of the children just watched him. Some were smiling.

From where Mrs. Meijer was standing and directing her attention, Craig could possibly have thought that he was in the back row, as his row was the farthest away from the scissors cans. Two pieces of evidence tend to dispute

this, however. First, Mrs. Meijer had consistently referred to Craig's row as the first or front row and to the other row as the fourth or last row. Second, no other children from Craig's row moved toward the scissors, and all three children from the back row did get up. Three of the four children in the back row are "with-it, together" kids. Did Craig truly think that he was in the back row or could it have been the excitement of the first art lesson? As the year went on Craig proved himself to be one of the most talented artists in the class. Was he not listening to Mrs. Meijer and tuning out on the "back row" portion of her directions? Craig, as he did when the children were lining up to go home, stood out in front of the whole class for not following directions.

An example of Craig's inability to size up the social situation in the classroom will be presented next. It happened on a day when there was a slight change in the established routine involving the use of the microcomputer in the classroom.

Integration Skills

> It was a hectic Tuesday in Room 125. It was their day to have the microcomputer in their class. It was also library day. Usually Mrs. Meijer left the computer in the room when they went to the library. This particular day, however, she decided to wheel the whole computer cart down to the library. She wanted the children to go right on with their turn when they weren't selecting books.
>
> Mrs. Meijer hadn't made an announcement to the class about her plan, but it seemed obvious what she had in mind when she pushed the heavy cart down the hall and set it up in the library. After it was ready to go she called John over to take his turn. John did the program and went to tap Craig whose name was next on the list. Craig stopped what he was doing and then walked back to the classroom, passing right by the computer as he did. Mrs. Meijer noticed that no one was using the computer and was checking into it when Craig came back from the classroom with a puzzled look on his face. Mrs. Meijer got him started on the program and went on to help other children select books.

Mrs. Meijer used this incident later as an example of Craig's lack of "integration skills." It seems to point to his difficulty with social

perception as noted previously. One might assume that by second grade, when a child sees his teacher push a cart loaded with a microcomputer down to the library that he would realize that they would be using it there. No other children were observed going back to the room to use the computer. Also, Craig was not the first child called up to work on the machine. In this instance, he seemed to be oblivious to the surroundings. On some occasions Craig was able to observe other children's behavior and to imitate it. Not this time.

These brief vignettes are meant to give the reader a little of the essence of Craig. From these admittedly brief stories it may be possible to see why Mrs. Meijer referred him for help.

Conclusions and Implications

Throughout the difficult process of looking at a child who is not succeeding in school and trying to decide if special education services are an appropriate alternative, the regular education classroom teacher is in a pivotal position. Teachers are rarely given credit by the public, or even by their own administrators, for the complexity of the decisions they must make about children. Simply having a general understanding of the typical behavioral characteristics that indicate one or another handicapping condition did not provide enough specific, contextually embedded information for the teacher to make the practical decision to refer a child for special education services. Therefore, the teacher looked at the whole context of classroom life. Although not a new finding, the importance of the interactions that occurred in the first few weeks of the school year were a factor in Mrs. Meijer's special education referral decisions. I did not see how crucial the students' interactional competence was in the early weeks of the school year until later

in the year. Once Mrs. Meijer referred some children for special education and I started going back through the field notes, I saw how they set themselves apart even from the first days. Mrs. Meijer said that she had chosen specific children as helpers on the first day because of what she already knew about them. She looked at the children who had been leaders in first grade as well as those who were of concern to their teachers.

Once the majority of the class knew the procedures and routines, it was those children who continued to set themselves apart that Mrs. Meijer remained concerned about. These children were out of step. They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. They said the wrong things at the wrong time. They could not put their papers in the correct basket. These children were not in tune with Mrs. Meijer's expectation for their interactional performance. Without a doubt, it was Craig who set himself the furthest apart in the room.

Mrs. Meijer carefully considered the opportunities for extra help within her district before she referred anyone. She felt strongly that the Learning Disabilities (LD) resource room program at the school would benefit Craig. However, she apparently did not feel that there were any special services for her slow learners, the "doesn't quite have it" group. Even though they were unsuccessful with second-grade work, they lacked the profile that she considered an indication of learning disability. What these characteristics were was never defined, but the names of the two informal groups, the "has it but can't put it together" and the "doesn't quite have it" children, seemed to indicate that cognitive ability was a strong factor for Mrs. Meijer's choices. It was clear from the data that "it" to the teacher meant intelligence. I believe that the data from this study support the idea that a teacher's referral decisions are made, in part, on the perceived availability of services in the district. Services were available in the district for LD

children who had "it," but there was no mention to me of services for those who didn't quite have "it."

The special education referral decisions Mrs. Meijer made were also based on the sense she made out of the interactional performances of the children in her classroom. It is in the constructing of patterns of action and meaning that teachers identify problem students. These children "point themselves out" as Craig did when he went up for scissors at art time when it wasn't his row's turn, stayed seated when all the others had lined up to go home, sat in the path of everyone the day he had to sit on the floor for rocking in his seat, and when he poked his head in front of the flashlight beam after Mrs. Meijer had told them if they did it one more time that would be the end of the experiment.

Mrs. Meijer looked at their interactional performance in a variety of contexts. The things she noticed in the first days and weeks of the school year were crucial when she formed her first group of target children. Mrs. Meijer used the term "target children" to indicate those students who she wanted to look at more closely for their ability to focus, interact, and integrate skills. These factors were tempered by her own perception of the child's needs and the services available in the school district.

In summary then, Mrs. Meijer said that Craig could not follow directions. He lacked the integration skills to put everything together. He needed a visual structure to follow, and he could not generalize well to other situations in the classroom. These were some of the important factors that led to Mrs. Meijer's referral of Craig to special education. Eventually, the building team and Craig's parents decided that Craig needed special education, and it was at this point (June) that Craig got his special education identity through the recommendations of the formal, Individualized Educational Program committee.

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